

THE COMMONWEALTH'S RURAL TOWNS

April 28, 2017

A report to the Rural Policy Commission developed
by the Demographics and Economic Development
Committees

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

This presentation contains:

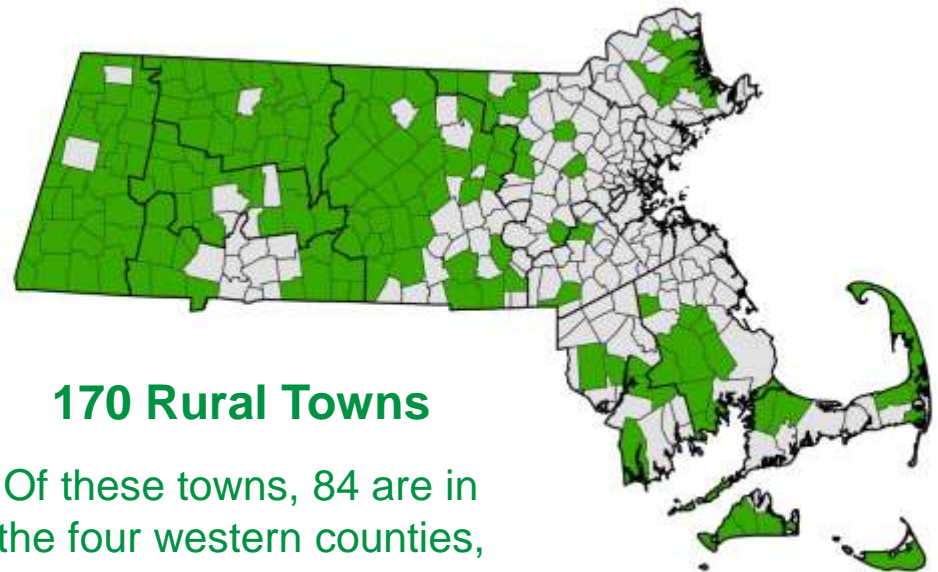
- An overview of demographic and socio-economic trends in Rural Towns, including:
 - Comparisons of the aggregate of Rural Towns to the State
 - Comparisons of regional differences among Rural Towns
- Sub-regions with shared characteristics, which may influence how strategies are implemented.
- Potential approaches for economic development in different types of Rural Towns.



View of Sunderland's village center from Mt. Sugarloaf.

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

- The definition of “rural” is a municipality with a population density of less than 500 people per sq. mile.
- Nearly half of all municipalities are Rural Towns.
- Population of Rural Towns is 830,000 (13% of state).
Equivalent to population of Boston + Worcester + Lexington
- 59% of the State’s total land area.



170 Rural Towns

Of these towns, 84 are in the four western counties, and 86 are in the eastern counties.

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

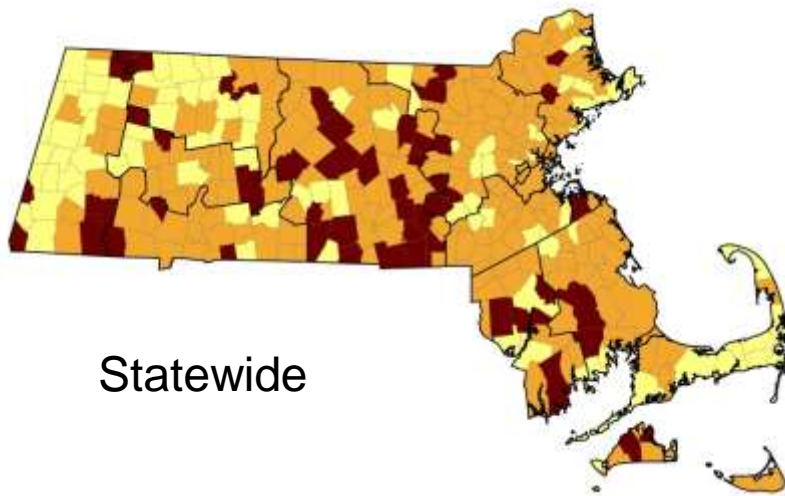
In *aggregate*, demographic and socio-economic trends in Rural Towns are comparable to the State with some exceptions.

Often, the greatest differences are between *east* and *west* Rural Towns.

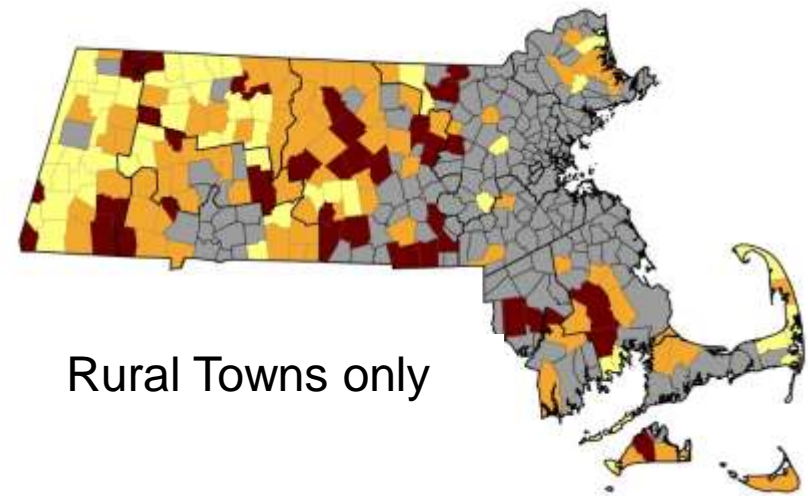
Categories

- Recent population change
- Population by age cohort
 - Under 18 years
 - 65 years and older
- Median household income
- Average Home Value
- Highest educational attainment
 - High School Diploma or less
 - Some college or more
- Employment by selected industry
- Self-employed workers
- Workers in private, for-profit sector

Rural Towns in Massachusetts



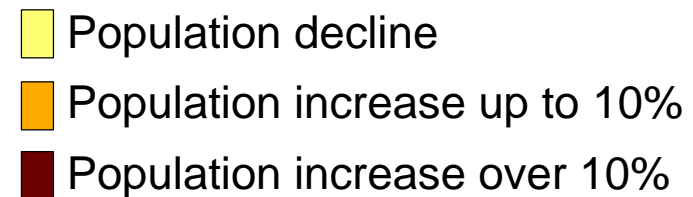
Statewide



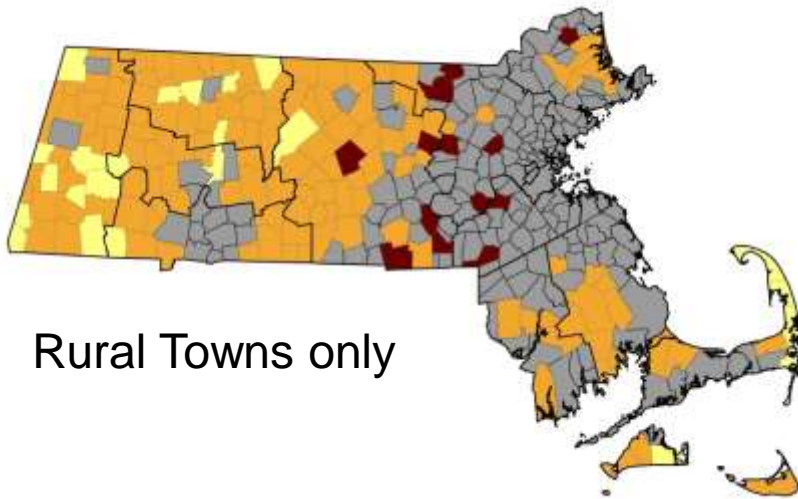
Rural Towns only

2000-2010 % Population Change:

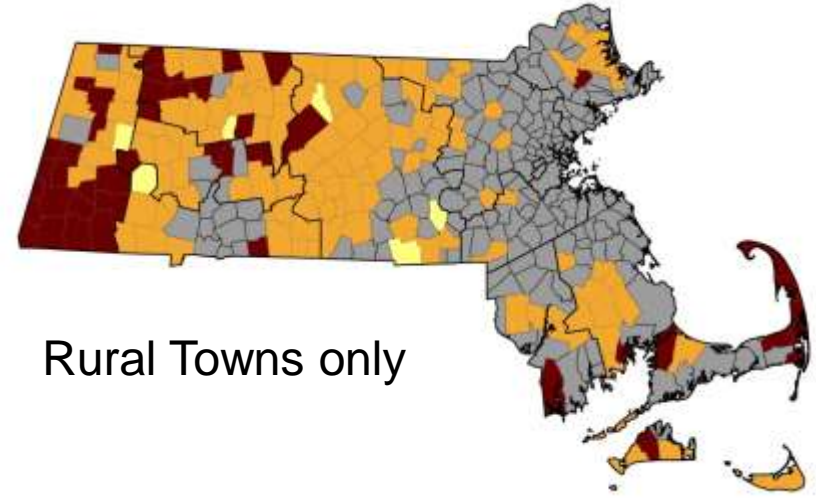
- 3% statewide growth
- 5% growth in Rural Towns
- Greater population decline in western Rural Towns



Rural Towns in Massachusetts



Rural Towns only



Rural Towns only

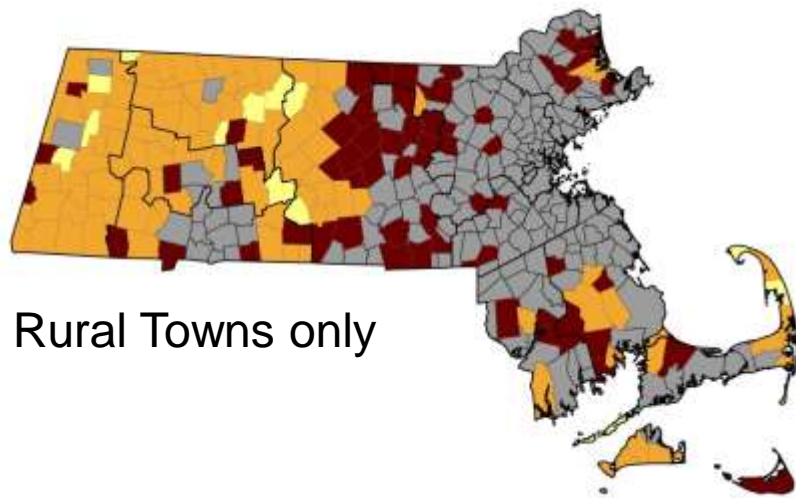
Population under 18 years:

- 21% statewide
- 21% in Rural Towns
- More Rural Towns in the east with a higher percentage.

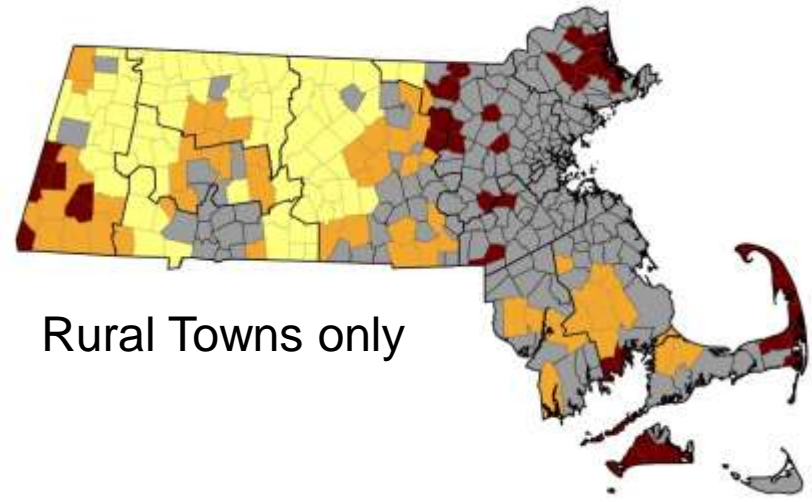
Population 65 years and over:

- 15% statewide
- 17% in Rural Towns
- More Rural Towns in the west with a higher percentage.

Rural Towns in Massachusetts



Rural Towns only



Rural Towns only

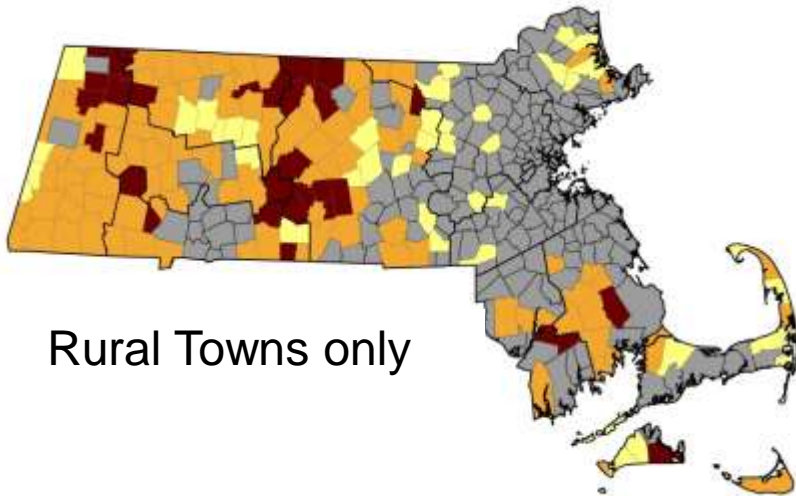
Median Household Income:

- \$68,653 statewide MHI
- More at or below statewide MHI in west

Average Single Family Home Value:

- Statewide median not available.
- Median of the municipalities' average is about \$306,000
- More above statewide median in east, and in southwest area

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

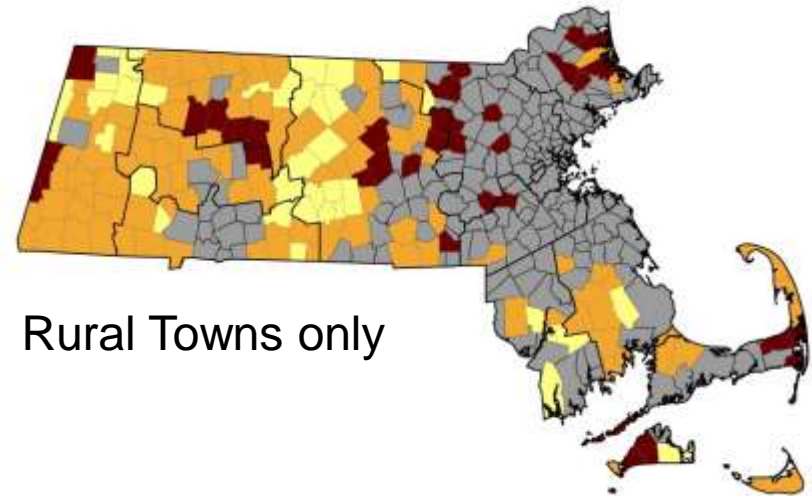


Rural Towns only

Highest Educational Attainment:

High School Diploma or less

- 36% statewide
- 33% in Rural Towns
- More Rural Towns below statewide rate in east.



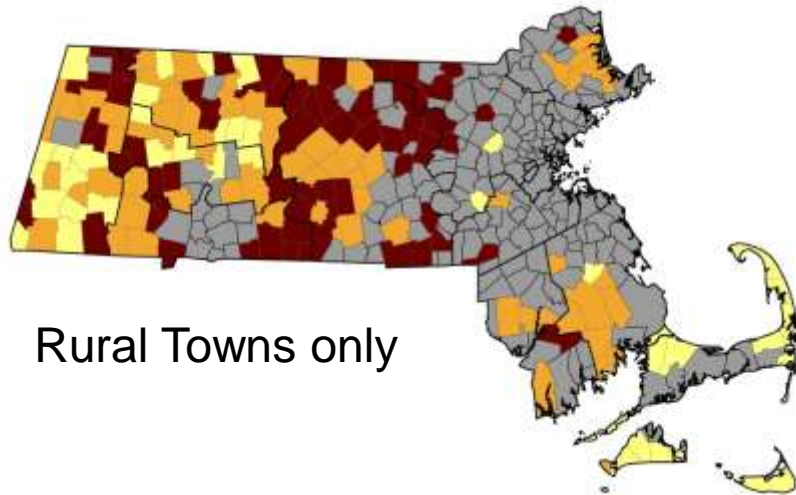
Rural Towns only

Highest Educational Attainment:

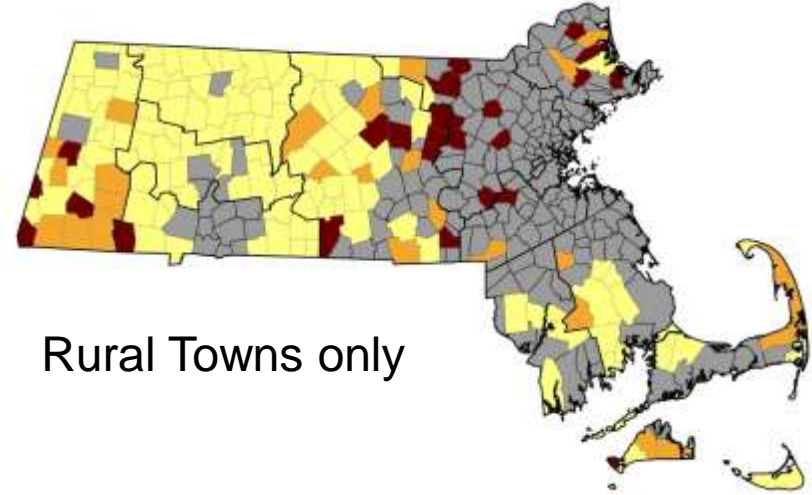
Some College or higher

- 64% statewide
- 67% in Rural Towns
- More Rural Towns above the statewide rate in the east.

Rural Towns in Massachusetts



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Employment by Industry:

Employed in Manufacturing

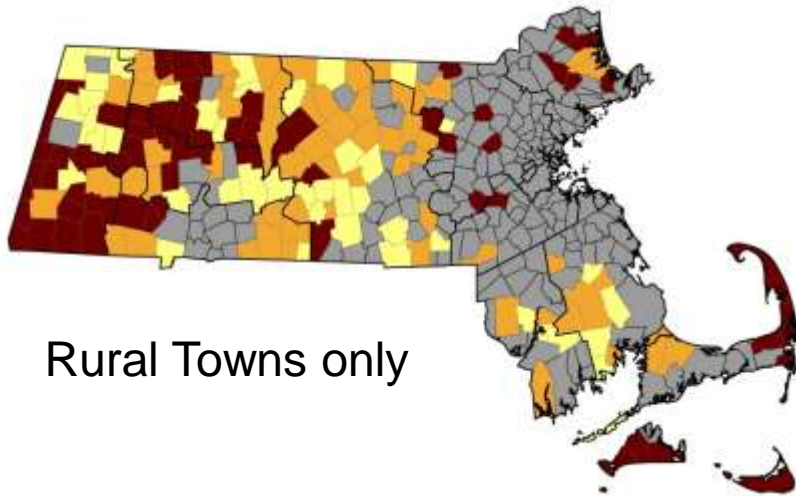
- 9% statewide
- 11% in Rural Towns

Employment by Industry:

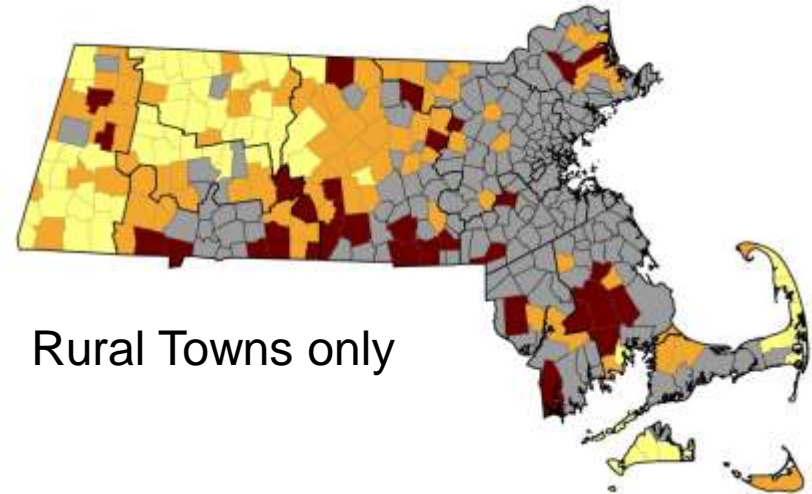
Employed in Professional, Scientific, and Management

- 13% statewide
- 11% in Rural Towns

Rural Towns in Massachusetts



Rural Towns only



Rural Towns only

Self Employed:

- 9% statewide
- 12% in Rural Towns
- More Rural Towns above state average in west
- Includes all industries.

For-Profit Workers:

- 69% statewide
- 66% in Rural Towns
- More Rural Towns above state average in east.
- Includes all industries.

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

The conditions needed to access jobs and create jobs.

Access Jobs

- To prepare workers requires access to skills training and education
 - Community Colleges and Public Higher Education
 - Career Centers
- Ability for workers to connect to jobs
 - Transit services
 - Broadband access

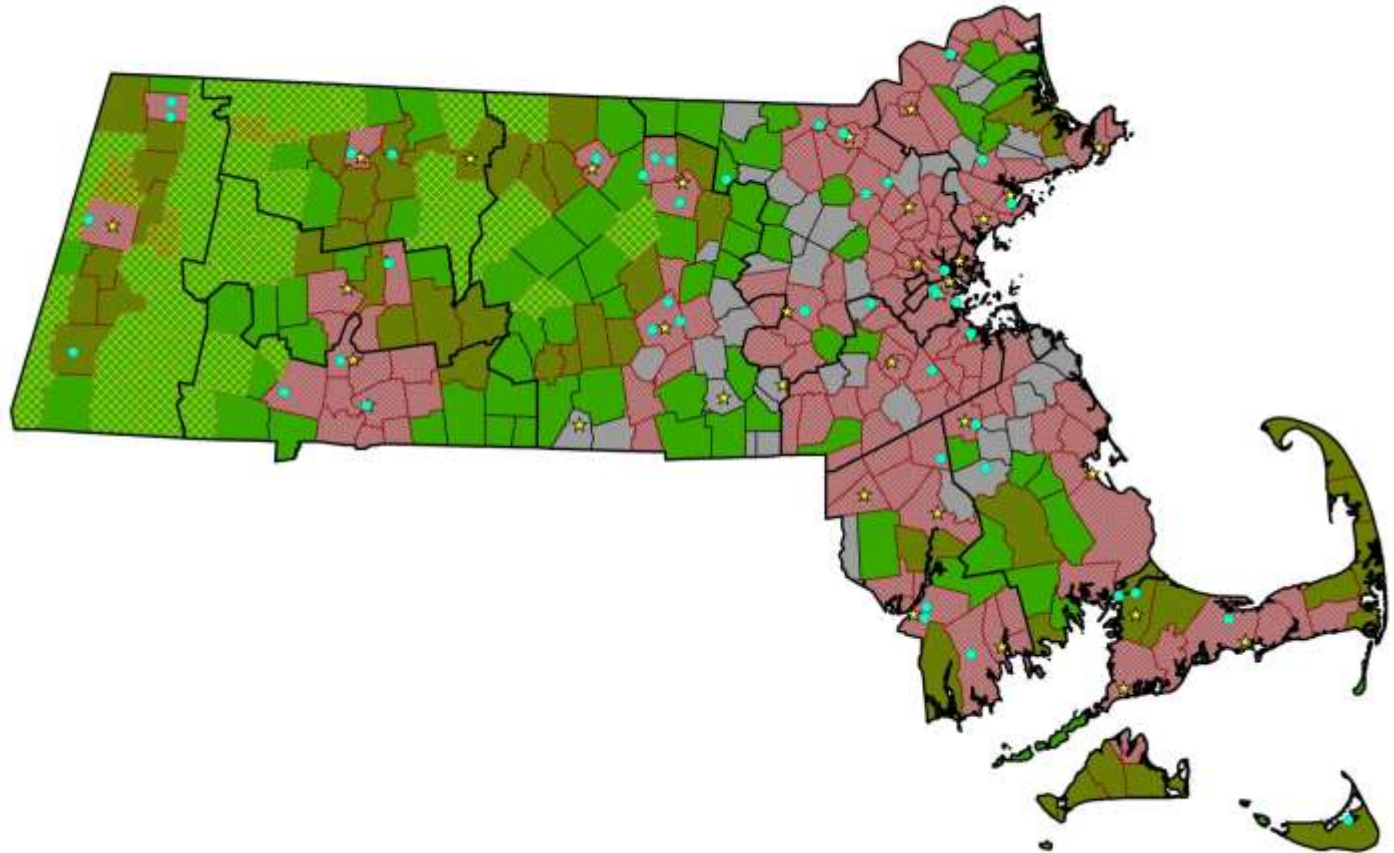
Create Jobs

- Suitable locations with infrastructure to support business development
- Technical assistance to develop a business
- Leverage opportunities in the community to develop businesses that will attract customers (as well as prospective employees and other entrepreneurs)
 - Natural assets – outdoor recreation, farm & food system
 - Housing affordability
 - Quality of life – culture, environment

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Access Jobs

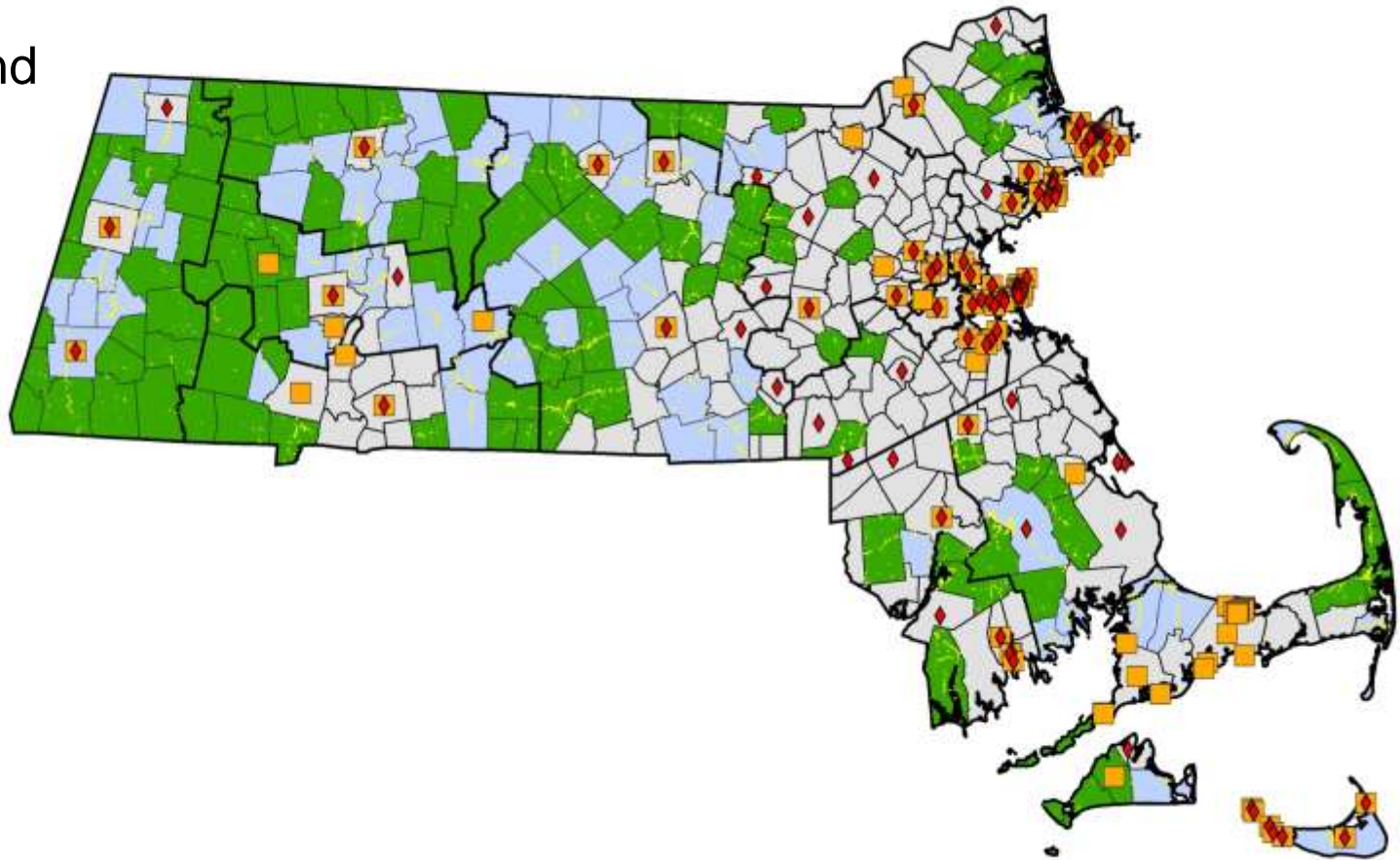
- Rural Towns
- Transit Service (red hatch)
- Unserved by Broadband (yellow hatch)
- Career Centers (yellow stars)
- Public Higher Education (light blue dots)



Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Create Jobs

- Rural Towns
- Both Water and Sewer (light blue)
- Business development assistance (orange squares, red diamonds)
- Commercial / Industrial Land Use (yellow areas)



Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Sub-regions of Shared Characteristics.

*While each town and region is different, based on the data, some **shared characteristics emerge** in particular sub-regions.*

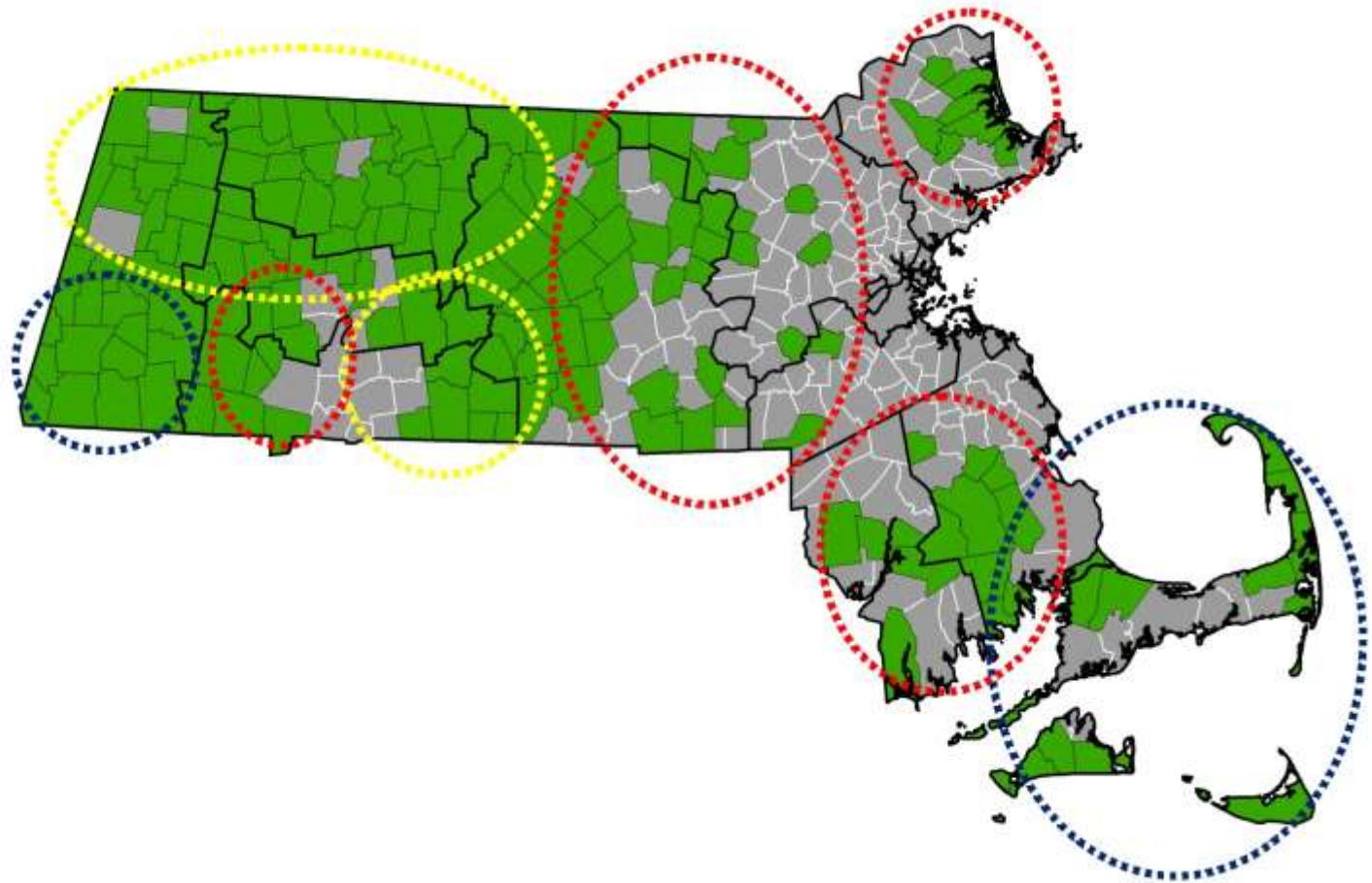
*Each of these characterizations have their own challenges and opportunities for economic development, which **provide a useful lens** when developing and implementing strategies.*

- Economic Distress
- Suburbs/Bedroom Communities
- Concentrations of Second Homes

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Areas of Shared Characteristics

- Suburbs/Bedroom Communities (red)
- Areas of Economic Distress (yellow)
- Concentrations of Second Homes (dark blue)



Approaches for Economic Development

What is the best approach for supporting residents in Rural Towns in creating and accessing economic opportunities?

- Not all approaches are suitable for all Rural Towns.
- ❑ Where are there gaps of needed services?
- ❑ What communities can support new business growth?
- ❑ How can rural residents access opportunities?
- Propose three approaches to categorize Rural Towns and then apply economic development strategies.

Approaches for Economic Development

Anchor Communities

- Identify lead RTs that serve as a employment or population centers to smaller RTs, in traditionally underserved or gap areas.
- Target support to extend services and resources to these communities.

Targeted Town Centers

- Identify RTs with defined town centers that could support commercial development.
- Assess infrastructure and support needed to enhance economic activity in the town center.

Low Density Rural

- Identify RTs without defined town centers.
- Implement projects to support home-based opportunities (such as through broadband access).